open wide our hearts
the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

High School Activity: Structures of Sin and Racism

Grade: High School-- Course 3 or Option C
Doctrinal Elements

- Living as a disciple of Jesus (CCC520, 618, 767, 1693)
- Putting Jesus' moral and spiritual teaching into practice
- Social Teaching of the Church: Church always has stood for charity and justice (CCC 953)
    - Social Justice (CCC 1928-1942)
- Major themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CCC 1877-1948, 2196-2257)
- Sin and Its Social Dimensions (1868-1869)

The persistence of the evil of racism is why we are writing this letter now.
People are still being harmed, so action is still needed."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Recognize the evil of racism as personal and structural.
2. Articulate the importance of solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching.
3. Think and talk about the ways racism is present in the structures of our world.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Overcoming racism is a demand of justice, but because Christian love transcends justice, the end of racism will mean that our community will bear fruit beyond simply the fair treatment of all."
- "Racism is a moral problem that requires a moral remedy—a transformation of the human heart—that impels us to act. The power of this type of transformation will be a strong catalyst in eliminating those injustices that impinge on human dignity."
- "The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality – economic and social – that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on the members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating

and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions."

Additional Resources for the Educator:

- USCCB backgrounders on racism and employment, housing, wealth, education, criminal justice, voting, and the Native American experience.
- A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land
- *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love.* A Pastoral Letter Against Racism
- *Discrimination and Christian Conscience: A Statement Issued by the Catholic Bishops of the United States*
- *What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States*

Instructions for the Lesson

Begin with a short prayer: **Wake Me Up Lord**[1]

> Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism
> finds no home within me.
> Keep watch over my heart Lord,
> and remove from me any barriers to your grace,
> that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters.
> Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give
> services of justice and peace.
> Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.
> And finally, remind us Lord that you said,
> "blessed are the peacemakers,
> for they shall be called children of God."
> Amen.

Review with the students CCC 1868-1869 on cooperation in sin, the rise of social situations and institutions contrary to divine goodness, and structures of sin. You might even project or print out these two paragraphs for students to read together since they are short.

- Ask: When do we have an obligation to "hinder" or "disclose" sins? How do you know?

- Ask: How are we called to help transform structures of sin? Watch together this short video about Catholic Social Teaching: Solidarity.
    - Talk with the students about the meaning of solidarity:
    - What does solidarity mean?
    - Why do we believe in solidarity with members of our one human family?

Assign for homework the night before the section of *Open Wide Our Hearts* that begins at "Being Open to Encounter and New Relationships," until the end of the statement. Alternatively, the students can review this short handout about the letter. If not in a classroom setting, pull out key points or excerpts to share with students.

[1] Excepted from *For The Love of One Another* (1989), a special message from the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Pastoral Letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the U.S. Catholic bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism (1979).

- Ask students to share, briefly:
    - What stood out to you?
    - What struck you about this part of the text?

- Divide the students into small groups. Distribute to each group one of the backgrounders on racism (topics include: criminal justice, voting, housing, employment, economic inequality). Explain that each is an example of the way racism is still very much impacting life today.

Write or project the following passage from *Open Wide Our Hearts*:

> Changing Structures
>
> *"The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality – economic and social – that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on the members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions. 'Even in the developed world,' Pope Francis told members of the U.S. Congress, 'the effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples.'"*

Ask the group members to read through the backgrounder, then discuss what surprised or jumped out at them.

- How are members of God's family (which is all of us!) impacted by this issue?
- Read the passage on "Changing Structures" from *Open Wide Our Hearts*. What structures need to be changed in order to address this issue?

Next, have them use a tablet/computer/laptop (one device per group or pair) to find an article that shows how people or a community are working to address one or more of the issues in the backgrounder, or find a news article related to their backgrounder issue. Be sure to ask them to think critically about the source of their information. Would their source be allowed in a research paper? Whose voices are represented in the telling of the story? Whose are not?

- Then discuss:
    - Where are people acting in solidarity to address this issue?
    - What are the obstacles to true solidarity? How can you change some of those obstacles? (For example, an obstacle to solidarity could be lack of awareness or proximity, or a sense of apathy. Encounter, education and empathy can help someone develop solidarity.)
    - As people of faith, why should we care about this issue and get involved in solving it?

- Ask groups to report back to the larger group.

- Have small groups brainstorm ways to respond, and then share one or two ideas with the large group.

If time allows: Research what faith-based organizations are doing anti-racism work.

- Are there groups doing work in your community?
    - Research Catholic Campaign for Human Development-funded groups by visiting this map.
        - Are racism or related issues part of their work?
        - Learn more about this group. How is the work of this group connected to Catholic Social Teaching and solidarity?
- Alternatively, research stories of hope on PovertyUSA.
    - How does that work exemplify Catholic Social Teaching?
- How can you contribute to faith-based anti-racism work that is happening in your community?

Summary and Final Activity:

- Talk with your family about what you learned about social sin and what changes are needed to address racism.
- Explore the PovertyUSA map together to find out if there are community organizations you can get involved with as a family or with friends.

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